

BACK FENCE

Veterans
CONTINUING TO SERVE



THIS WEEK: Doing what
needs to be done

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AIDING FAMILIES

Veterans' Organization Works To Help Injured Servicemen

"They also serve who only stand and wait."
— JOHN MILTON.

Many programs exist to help our armed forces personnel in time of need. Many come under the auspices of the federal Department of Veterans Affairs. The Virginia Department of Veterans Services has come alive under its dynamic commissioner, Vince Burgess, a dedicated staff, and several citizen boards. It has had the attention of the highest levels of state government, with Governors Mark Warner and Tim Kaine and bipartisan key legislators from both the House of Delegates and the State Senate strongly supporting its programs.

But, as Milton stated, there are others who have served, waiting for their loved ones to return from combat. They are mostly overlooked in the process and, while the government tries to help them, their unique status often causes them unintended hardship. Enter the Families of the Wounded Fund.

I've been involved with many worthwhile non-profits and their fund-raising subsidiaries, serving as the chief executive officer of three of them. Foundations for fund-raising are typically begun to support parent organizations or constituencies. They usually act as a behind-the-scenes helper to free the board or the key officers of the primary association to attend to the organization's primary activities. In short, foundations usually spring into being to help fulfill unfunded mandates. And, typically, those serving on the foundation board do it for altruistic reasons with only the good of the parent entity in mind.

Altruistic, Fulfilling

I've been personally involved in helping to support many charities, but the Families of the Wounded Fund is the most altruistic and the most fulfilling.

The McGuire Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Richmond is treating some of America's most severely wounded servicemembers following their medical evacuations from Afghanistan and Iraq. McGuire is nationally recognized as having unique and very excellent capabilities in the rehabilitation of those with head and spinal-cord injuries. These neurological wounds are often horribly traumatic and often complicated by the loss of sight, hearing, or limbs, and severe burns. With such wounds, many servicemembers never would have survived in earlier conflicts.

But these soldiers aren't the only ones suffering. Coming to Richmond from Walter Reed Army Hospital or Bethesda National Naval Medical Center, they are usually accompanied by their primary next of kin and often other family members.

The families of these patients are typically in Richmond for four-to-six weeks — occasionally longer. While the government provides some degree of support, these families still find themselves in an unfamiliar city, often far from home, facing terrible hardships that are exacerbated by concerns for their wounded loved ones. In addition, too many of them find that while they are here, the bills pile up at home. Consequently, in 2005 a group of us — all veterans representing all branches of service, most of whom had been in combat — met to discuss what we as a community could do to help, and the Families of the Wounded Fund, Inc. became a reality. Cal Esleeck, a Vietnam Marine infantry officer and CPA, "volunteered" to take care of the paperwork, for which he was rewarded by being elected the group's president. As we'd done before, we were going to take care of the troops.

These soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines returning wounded from Iraq or Afghanistan have a long and very difficult road ahead. Most are young and their lives and the lives of their families have been forever changed. Regardless of their gender, race, or ethnic heritage, these Americans and their

families clearly understand the high cost of freedom. They need and deserve all the support we can muster. Simply put, helping military families is the right thing to do.

The purpose of the fund is to raise money and assist these families while they are here in Richmond. We have been doing this since the fall of 2005, and for the community's generosity, we are most grateful. However, it is apparent that we need to increase our level of family support. This comes as patient loads are expected to rise and our funds continue to be depleted.

Penny-for-Penny Return

Our current *modus operandi* is to contact the families at the hospital and offer our help. With no paperwork other than signing a receipt, the family member is given a debit card in the value of \$3,000. The gratitude from these heroes' loved ones for having been bailed out of difficult situations provides the impetus for us to do more. To date, 100 percent of donated money has gone to the families. Administrative overhead is being handled by Village Bank, for which we and the families of the wounded are profoundly grateful.

It truly is much better to give than to receive. Please get the word to your friends, associates, church groups, civic organizations, etc.

■ *A Richmond resident, retired Navy commander and attack pilot Paul Galanti was a prisoner of war in Vietnam from 1966 until 1973. He is currently the chairman of the Board of Veterans Services for the Commonwealth. His Commentary Columns regarding veterans appear regularly on the Back Fence.*

FAMILIES OF THE WOUNDED FUND, INC.

c/o Village Bank
P.O. Box 330
Midlothian, Virginia 23113
ID# 32-0157288

Board of the Families of the Wounded Fund:

■ Martha Colvin, RN (USA) ■ James H. Dement Jr. (USAF)
■ R. Calvert Esleeck Jr., president (USMC) ■ Paul E. Galanti (USN) ■ Thomas Gallagher (USAF) ■ William G. Haneke (USA) ■ E. Bruce Heilman (USMC) ■ L. W. "Chip" Houston (USMC) ■ Thomas W. Winfree, president and CEO, Village Bank (USN) ■ William E. Lyell (USMC, deceased)



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LEE'S CHALLENGE

U.S. Veterans Might Insist That Iraqis Shape Iraq's Future

At the conclusion of hostilities, Gen. Robert E. Lee sent his troops home with the admonition to "do your duty in all things. You cannot do more, you should never wish to do less." Lee's final instruction to these veterans of both the North and South was to return home to raise their families to be good citizens. Those words are just as true for today's veterans.

For the foreseeable future, our military will be engaged in the global war against terrorism. We will repeatedly have to decide, as a nation, when and where to deploy our armed forces. So what does duty require of a veteran, or any citizen for that matter, when the country is deciding these questions? One alternative is to avoid the question altogether and automatically adopt the position of the civilian leadership. Frankly, this alternative is very appealing, but unacceptable. Most veterans believe they are duty-bound to review vigorously the employment of the military.

Unfortunately, discussion of options other than "staying the course" are often mocked and ridiculed as unpatriotic. Many veterans find it disheartening to watch as politicians — many of whom managed to avoid military service — sow disunity at home while our young people are fighting overseas. Rather than enter an honest discussion to be certain that the blood of Americans is being spilled *only* to meet direct threats to the nation, many of our political leaders attack fellow Americans — many of whom are decorated veterans — for even suggesting that there could be a different way to protect the nation.

Duty Requires Debate

Added to this carping is a certain echo-chamber segment of the media that dismisses as "anti-military" almost any effort to review the decisions of civilian leadership. These attacks are particularly troubling when many veterans believe "doing your duty in all things" requires such discussion and debate.

Veterans know that our armed forces go where the country sends them and fight our country's battles without discussion or hesitation. This unwavering and noble bidding of the nation's military business requires a similar commitment by those of us at home. It falls directly on veterans to make certain that our military is employed judiciously for the country's defense and not for uncertain notions of nation-building or for fighting someone else's fight.



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In the current war in Iraq, military supporters owe a duty to ask the hard questions that active servicemembers are unable to ask. Is the civilian leadership employing the military in the best manner for the national security? Is the military being asked to do only what it is trained and equipped to do? And, in a question that reminds many veterans of the Vietnam War, has the civilian leadership adequately defined the mission and success? Asking these questions does not indicate a lack of support for the troops. Rather, refusal to demand answers to these tough questions is shirking Lee's challenge to be good citizens.

Most veterans support the notion of "taking the fight to the enemy." In the wake of the attacks of 9/11, we rapidly mobilized to find those responsible. We took the fight to the Taliban in Afghanistan. We have pursued Osama bin Laden and his ilk, killing or capturing most of those associated with the attacks on our homeland. We have sent the message clearly that there is no safe haven for anyone who attacks us or supports those who attack us. Regardless of how one views the initial invasion and occupation of Iraq, our willingness to do so sent a clear message of our resolve. Thus, the question is not our resolve to fight to protect our country. Rather, the question is: Do the Iraqis have the resolve to fight and win the battle for their country?

To date, it is unclear if the stakes for the Iraqis will ever be high enough for Iraqi leaders to put aside their differences and do the fighting that is necessary to secure their country's future. Rather than reach out to their fellow Iraqis across ethnic and religious lines, the Iraqi prime minister and "national unity cabinet" have recently reached out to Iran and Hezbollah. Even more troubling has been the Iraqi political leadership's greediness regarding which group of Iraqis will reap the most money from the country's oil industry. This has been reported as one of the primary, if not the main, sticking points preventing the further unification of Iraq. As long as the leadership squabbles over oil money, ordinary Iraqis will continue to suffer and die.

It is understandable that divvying up oil money is hard work because everyone wants his fair share, as he defines it. Unfortunately, while the Iraqi leadership postures over money and power, the hardest work is being done by the U.S. military. It is Americans who have carried the fight and attempted to quell the violence among the various factions within Iraq. While our people are at the tip of the spear, the Iraqis have failed to train, equip, and deploy their own security forces sufficiently to protect their citizens. The Iraqis' lack of progress and misplaced priorities are now costing American blood and treasure.

Iraqis Must Make Decisions

Our servicemembers report back to us that ordinary Iraqis, particularly children, have paid a large price for the continued violence. We also hear that many of the Iraqi people are grateful for our efforts. Yet Iraqi leaders seem unwilling to make the tough decisions that are necessary to secure the future of their own country and citizens. Duty requires that we demand they do so — now.

The soldiers going home at the end of the Civil War had shaped our nation's future like no other group of people since the Founding Fathers. They had endured hardship and adversity in an epic struggle between diametrically different views of the future of the country. Because we were unable to resolve a fundamental question that threatened our very existence, our nation had to determine our national will on the battlefield. Likewise, it is time the Iraqis determine their national will, peacefully or by armed conflict. In either case, the time has come for them to do so for themselves.

■ *A graduate of West Point, John Montgomery retired from the Army after having served as an Airborne Ranger and inspector general of the Louisiana National Guard. A Sandston resident and lawyer, he advised former Governor Mark Warner on military issues. His Commentary Columns regarding veterans appear regularly on the Back Fence.*



Your 2 Cents

■ Give us **Your 2 Cents** by leaving a message on the telephone line at 804-559-VENT (804-559-8368) or e-mail to your2cents@timesdispatch.com. Please provide your first and last name, street address, locality in which you live, and daytime telephone number for verification. Each selected comment will appear with the contributor's name and locality only. Your 2 Cents appears Sundays on the Back Fence. Messages are subject to editing, and not all can be published. Please try to keep comments to fewer than 50 words.

Whenever I hear references to treated sewage sludge being used as fertilizer on crops, I try not to think too much about it. That's for fear I'll balk at eating my veggies. Is it possible that such sludge contaminated the irrigation water in spinach fields? It's been reported that the *E. coli* was in the roots of the plant, so washing the spinach would not be effective.

Will this process of using sewage sludge now be re-examined?

— **Bea Merkle, Henrico**

This occurred to me when I heard about the spinach:
*He used to be a powerful lad.
Now this macho sailor is very sad.
Poor weakened Popeye could have E. coli*

— **Loyce Craig, Chesterfield**

I think the city government has it right: Outlaw prostitutes and johns from being in neighborhoods where solicitation problems exist. Push these problems into all areas in and around Central Virginia. That should keep housing prices down. Then continue to market downtown ("A River City lifestyle"), where violent crime is rampant. Earlier this year there was a push to address the violent crime in the area. Have we done enough on crime? Is it a nonissue now and we can move on to another complex issue? Let's not dilute our focus and move into other areas until we get a solution to crime. Maybe next week we can solve mad-cow disease.

— **Douglas Williams, Midlothian**

The terror suspects agreement reached by rebel Republicans and Presi-

dent Bush resembles a surrender by our Senator Warner, not a compromise. With the words, "[T]he president has the authority to interpret the meaning and application" of the Geneva Conventions, all the rest is rendered toothless. Was this just a political ruse at election time or was it a sincere effort made to reclaim our honor as a nation?

— **Margie Cousins, Henrico**

I think Bill Clinton should switch to decaf.

— **Jim Seay, Henrico**

Too bad Republicans spent so much money uncovering Bill Clinton's lies. They could use it now to help cover up George Bush's.

— **Ernest Irby, Henrico**

Thank you, thank you, thank you, to the people who slowed down and stopped on I-95 North to protect a white, fluffy, stray dog; to the two people who pulled off to help me, and especially the young gentleman who caught the dog; to the veterinarians and staff at Ashcake Animal Clinic who treated it and even went the extra mile to clip and clean it up; to the Henrico County dog officer who explained what my choices were and was so helpful.

— **Nancy Harris, Hanover**

I am really glad to see that Wal-Mart is going to sell generic drugs for \$4 per prescription. I hope the drug companies will get their just do. They have been ripping the American people off long enough, charging anywhere from \$2-\$20 for pills that didn't cost them 50 cents to make. I hope Wal-Mart will get this done nationwide just as soon as they can possibly institute it. There are millions of people out here who can't afford to pay the co-payment, let alone pay the high price for the drugs. I hope Wal-Mart keeps it up.

— **Jerry Stone, Rockville**

Boy, how clear 30-year-old memories get, the more partisan they get.

— **Baird Stokes, Richmond**

Please tell me why nurses are allowed to stand at the entrance to day surgery at Henrico Doctors' Hospital on Parham and blow cigarette smoke all over us as we enter. Also, at the entrance to the medical office complex at 7229 Forest Avenue one will find the same sick situation. What is wrong with this picture, other than sick?

— **Rose DiPaolo, Henrico**

From an article in your paper regarding building of a stadium for the University of Richmond: If I had \$16 million of a

cost of \$20 million, I'd be digging and building right now. They say the overall cost went up \$9 million since 2003; how much will it cost in 2008?

— **Ernest Mackey, Richmond**

Our glorious TIMES-DISPATCH reported that Richmond needs a new jail. The current one is overcrowded and some of the inmates sleep on the floor. Jail is not supposed to be a country club. The inmates are lucky they have whatever amenities they do have. They are criminals, in jail because they committed a crime. Let them be overcrowded, let them eat peanut butter and jelly three times a day, and why not let them perform jobs to help the community (working off some of the huge expense you and I spend caring for them).

— **Helen Silvette McIver, Richmond**

To Paula Robins of Keysville, thank you for your response to my suggestion about your station. I was hasty. I know what you're fighting. We are trying to rehabilitate the Hull Street station in Richmond and it's taking an eternity. The best suggestion that I have is to please contact a friend with the National Railway Historical Society in situations like this, and maybe they will have someone with enough clout that we can encourage the railroads to be a little bit more thought-conscious about preserving their heritage.

— **Phil Wallace, Chesterfield**